

IF
WE
BUILD
IT?

WE ALL ENVISION
OUR FIELD OF DREAMS,
PLACES WHERE
TEACHERS CONNECT,
CONTRIBUTE, AND
LEAD. BUT IF
WE BUILD IT,
WILL THEY COME?

PRINCIPLES FOR BUILDING STRONG DIGITAL COMMUNITIES

The principles on the following pages are a guide to creating stronger digital communities with and for teachers. While each is important, practicing them in concert will drive the greatest impact—especially when engaging teacher leaders to underpin your efforts.

#1 CLARITY CREATES CONSISTENCY (AND VICE VERSA)

Get clear on who you are and show up that way every single day

What's the aim of creating this community for teachers? What will your "voice" be? These are just some of the questions you should be able to answer for the community you are building. Additionally, the answers should be heavily informed by what your target community members will find relevant.

Why it's important: Community members will feel most open to growing together if their experience is consistent and fulfilling. Therefore, a strong identity is a must to avoid distrust, confusion, and eventual abandonment.

What it looks like in action: Follow charity: water and you'll immediately notice the consistency in their "voice" and "presence." For example, they believe in taking an optimistic approach, so their imagery, video, and language is focused on smiles, possibility, and the happiness that clean water brings. Additionally, they believe in transparency, and follow that up with a full look of where and how donation dollars are used. PS—You might notice principle #4 shining pretty brightly here too.

#2 TALK WITH, NOT TO

Commit to regular conversations and always ask for feedback

One of the simplest things you can do to build strong community is create an ongoing dialogue with and among members.

Why it's important: Dialoging leads to communality and stronger ties in every direction. By publicly asking for feedback (and acting on what you hear), you will also ensure you're building a safe and welcoming environment that breeds trust and camaraderie.

What it looks like in action: Remind is an excellent example here. Take a look at their "tweets & replies" tab on Twitter. You'll immediately notice they are replying and conversing, just as much as they are sharing content. There's no question, their account is more than a megaphone.

#3 STRONG RELATIONSHIPS = STRONG COMMUNITY

Invest equally in relationship building with and among members

Building and maintaining relationships is a lot of work. The good news is the effort is rewarding for all parties involved! To this end, it's important to reach out to your most engaged community members and have 1:1 conversations from time to time. Get to know them, share their work, and connect them to opportunities to pay it forward within the community.

Why it's important: Strong relationships lead to deeper levels of trust, intimacy, and room for positive reciprocity to bloom and multiply.

What it looks like in action: Common Sense Education's Certified Educators program gives teachers active in the Graphite community the opportunity to take on leadership roles. This leads to a sense of co-ownership and responsibility to their peers in ensuring the experience is valuable and satisfying. Most importantly, it ups the value proposition for all members—leaders and learners—since everyone is growing with (and from) each other.

#4 HOME IS WHERE THE HEART CO-CREATION IS

Provide ongoing opportunities for participating and contributing

Giving teachers room to shape the community will not only be intrinsically satisfying for them, it will also ensure that the community is constantly being infused with a healthy dose of heart. Not everyone will jump in—in fact, many won't—but being committed to co-creation will result in at least some teachers working with you to ensure the community thrives.

Why it's important: Community members feel personally responsible for taking care of what they've helped create. They'll also feel appreciative for the opportunity to share their voice.

What it looks like in action: BuzzFeed is an excellent example of giving your community a moment (or two, or three) at the mic. Anyone can publish there, and the most popular content is amplified. This gives community members an incentive to keep coming back—they can actively take part in building the community, while sharing, learning, and growing their own voice, too.

RESOURCES

An interesting read on how to build community in a school (great to get the brain going on how to do something for teachers online):

www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar03/vol60/num06/Creating-a-School-Community.aspx

A few good reads on the importance of building strong relationships:

<https://www.feverbee.com/the-real-skill-of-building-relationships/>

<https://www.feverbee.com/relationshipsinfluence/>

Here's why conversations are important:

www.researchgate.net/publication/222652237_Toward_a_dialogic_theory_of_public_relations

A quick read on co-creation from the marketing world:

www.pardot.com/content-marketing/cocreation-key-thirdstage-social/

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